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PEO STRI: New Devices, New Business

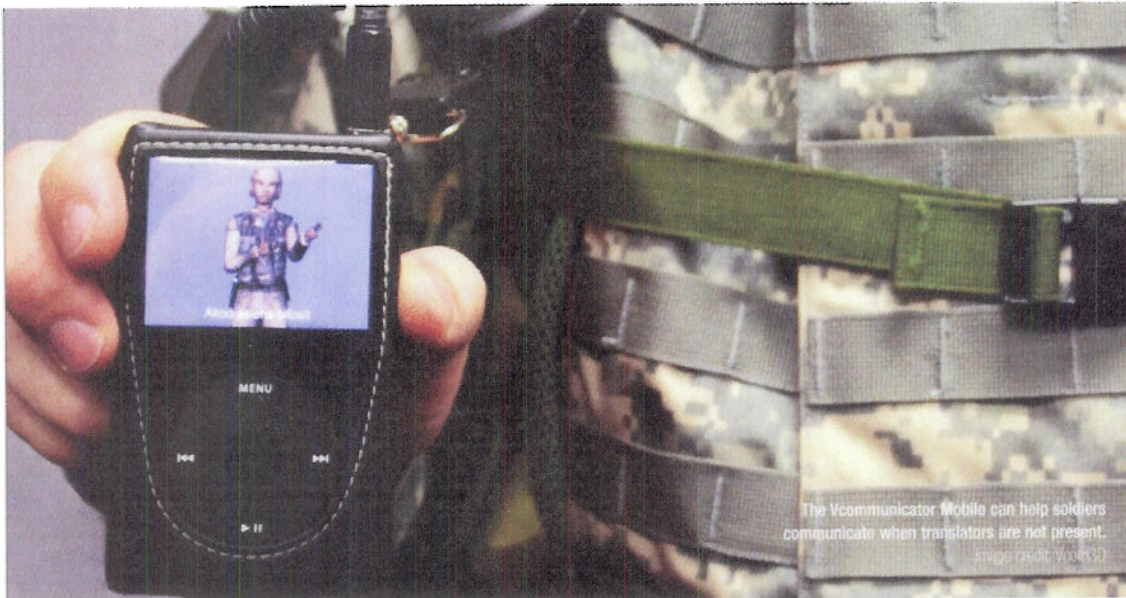
TRAINING TECHNOLOGY

Training for a Fifth Generation Aircraft

ISSN 1471-1052 | US \$14/£8

Issue 6/2007

PROCUREMENT



The Vcommunicator Mobile can help soldiers communicate when translators are not present.
Image credit: Vocom

PEO STRI Makeover

Streamlined, faster, better. **Chuck Weirauch** checks out the new way of doing business at PEO STRI.

Going to I/ITSEC 2007? Amidst the bark of simulated weapons fire and the white noise of booth business, you might be startled by a new sound - a piercing whistle. Unnerving at first, that whistle will call attention to new training products the US Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO STRI) will have on the show floor for 2007. Less obviously though, it also announces the many changes the PEO has made this year to significantly reduce the time it takes to turn training needs into training solutions delivered to the warfighter.

The whistle? That whistle is the sound of a soldier failing to properly discover and deal with a simulated Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The Training Improvised Explosive Device (T-IED) Increment 2, the most recent trainer, is an essential part of pre-deployment IED training at several Army training installations. IEDs are considered to be the leading cause of battlefield casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hence, such

training is critical. That's why the PEO decided to feature its latest IED training devices at its I/ITSEC exhibit areas this year.

In addition to T-IED, there will be examples of the electronic jamming devices the Army uses to interrupt radio frequency (RF) signals employed to trigger IEDs, as well as several examples of actual IEDs at the PEO display. According to Major Frank Bridges, so far the agency has issued more than \$90 million in contracts for IED training-related devices.

Most of these contracts have been awarded to small businesses, but now larger companies are stepping forward with IED training solutions. The PEO is planning to issue a large indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) IED training contract sometime in 2008. The timing is on target, since the Army needs industry help in keeping up with the many and diverse IED variants that are appearing in the field, Bridges said.

"It's just difficult to keep up with what's going on the field," Bridges said.

"We are under a lot of pressure to field devices sooner rather than later. Every time you turn around, it's a new IED or a new trigger. What we are having to focus on now is what is more common in certain areas of operation and try to replicate that to get soldiers enough time to recognize them."

Traditional procurement methodologies are simply not adequate to keep up with such rapid changes in IEDs. The PEO plans to employ its recently granted Head of Contracting Authority (HCA) and newly established Contracting Operations Office and Acquisition Center to help greatly improve the timeline between field requests/contract requirements and product delivery to the field through the new IDIQ contracts. According to PEO STRI Director of Acquisition Support Cory Youmans, the organization is now able to be much more responsive to warfighter needs, turning requirements into contracts much quicker than historically has been the case. Take the Vcommunicator Mobile

Language and Culture tool as an example.

In April 2007, PEO STRI received a statement of urgency from the 10th Mountain Division for a one-way language translation device. The Division command had seen the application by Orlando-based Vcom3D Inc. at I/ITSEC 2006 and decided it was "absolutely urgent" to get the device for the Division's First and the Fourth Combat Teams were preparing to mobilize and deploy this past summer and this coming winter.

The device, based in a basic Apple iPod, translates Iraqi and Afghan languages and provides that information on its video display screen. Other features include vocabulary training, the ability to call up the written language and the graphic presentation of a man who provides the culturally appropriate gestures that go along with the spoken word. The device includes a small, uniform-worn speaker that can project an appropriate response.

The tool is designed to provide tactical language and cultural knowledge anytime, anywhere, Youmans said. It provides tactical scenario-specific audio and video language phrases through iPod-based technology, allowing soldiers

at the squad, team, and individual level to effectively communicate with the local populous either by using the tool as a training platform, or by using it as a job aid. By providing a mission-specific vocabulary, the device allows soldiers and Marines to easily use the system's capabilities in support of operations normally executed by small-unit leaders, he explained.

After PEO STRI received the 10th Mountain Division's request, the agency worked with the Division and Vcom3D to refine requirements. It then awarded a contract to Vcom3D for 260 devices in July. The first shipment was delivered just a month later in August. With the first 130 devices delivered on the original iPod platform, the next 130 will be delivered based on the iPod Nano, which is half the size. That's the advantage of buying commercial off-the-shelf products, Youmans said, "since you always get the latest and greatest in new technology."

"I'm not aware of any other PDA-based language translator devices that can also provide the cultural gestures and written script, and especially on such a small device as an Apple iPod," Youmans said. "We expect that there is going to be a significant need for more of these devices. So we are processing an IDIQ

PEO STRI New Trainers

In addition to the IED and language trainer devices, PEO STRI will have several other new trainers at the show. The newest is the HMMWV Egress Assistance Trainer (HEAT), a mechanical live training device that replicates a full-scale M1114 up-armored Humvee. The Army has suffered a high number of casualties during rollovers of this variant, since the armor changes the vehicle's handling characteristics and makes it top-heavy. The device simulates a rolled-over HMMWV. The trainer can be rotated and stopped in various positions, making it the only Army training device that allows soldiers to practice a variety of egress techniques at different angles.

PEO STRI worked in collaboration with the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research Development and Engineering Center and Red River Army Depot to develop the HEAT Trainer. As of early October, a total of 18 HEAT systems have been fielded out of the 53 that are in the current operational needs statement, according to Lt. Col. Scott Pulford, PEO STRI Product Manager for Ground Combat Tactical Trainers (GCTT).

That number may be significantly increased in the near future, since the

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Army Central Command has just announced a requirement that all soldiers deploying to theater will conduct HEAT egress training prior to deployment, Pulford said. Thousands of soldiers have already had HEAT training, he said, but Pulford feels that probably there will be demand for more trainers beyond the original requirement.


According to Pulford, other newer GCTT trainers that will be at ITSEC include the Stryker variant of the Common Driver Trainer (CDT). There are now nine of these trainers currently in the field, with one system at every Stryker brigade installation. The fielding of five more such trainers began in October.

With the CDT approach proven and fielded, PEO STRI is working to expand the concept to other vehicles. New to the show will be a Humvee cab mounted on the CDT motion platform. This trainer will be linked to a sister system at Fort Benning, Georgia for a demonstration of convoy formation drills and other coordinated maneuvers, Pulford said.


A tank CDT variant is now going through initial development, and Pulford anticipates that the PEO will begin development work in 2008 on employing the technology as the platform for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) and Route Clearance-type vehicles such as the Buffalo. Other potential Army applications include those for the upcoming Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) that is to replace the Humvee and Army construction vehicles, he pointed out.

Other training products, devices and programs that will be on the ITSEC exhibit floor include DARWARS Ambush!, a new and enhanced version of the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES), Medical Simulation Training Centers, and enhanced capabilities for the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer (AVCATT).

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contract so that other customers – such as the Marines or the Air Force – can come to PEO STRI with a requirement and we can get on contract in a handful of days – and have the devices in the hands of the warfighters in a handful of weeks- instead of the traditional many months it normally takes to field such devices.”

While the language translator and IED trainer IDIQ contracts are in the wings for early 2008, the first HCA contract has already been awarded. In addition to reducing the time of getting new training devices out faster to the field, the PEO STRI contracting authority also provides the mechanism for the agency to provide training support for other US services, as well as for the entire Army.

In October, PEO STRI awarded the first contract under the HCA, one worth a potential total value of \$83 million, to General Dynamics Information Technology for support of the Air Force's Simulation, Training and Experimentation program. Under this service contract, General Dynamics will provide wargaming and mobilization planning support for the Air Force program's air staff.

"The award of this contract begins a new chapter in the history of PEO STRI," said Dr. Jim Blake, program executive officer for PEO STRI. "With the new HCA authority, we can ensure a streamlined acquisition process that expedites procurement, thus increasing our responsiveness to Warfighter readiness. I am pleased that the first contract awarded under the HCA illustrates our position to support all the services. I expect there will be many more collaborative efforts forged under this authority."

Claude Bolton, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (ASAALT), granted the PEO Army-wide contracting authority in December 2006. In essence, it gives the PEO the acquisition authority for all Army Training Aids, Devices, Simulators and Simulations (TADSS). This authority positioned PEO STRI to be the central acquisition agency for the Army when it comes to all training and simulation devices. In February of this year, Blake was granted Head of Contracting Activity Authority by ASAALT for Army simulation, training and instrumentation programs.

The new contracting authority streamlines the TADSS acquisition process to be more responsive to warfighters' needs by getting training solutions delivered to the field faster and more cost-effectively. It also provides the means for the PEO to expand the span of responsibility and manage the commensurate needed physical growth.

Another new component that will increase business is a new charter for the organization, which places more emphasis on interoperability through live, virtual and constructive training solutions. More emphasis has also been directed on the support of joint operations, which means more activity in support of USIFCOM and other US services training programs. The first PEO contract under its HCA for the Air Force is a reflection of that expanded focus.

According to Blake, the PEO conducted more than \$2 billion in contract business transactions in 2006. Primarily because of its new contractual authority, he expects the organization will be handling more than \$3 billion in contracts revenue per year by 2010. That amounts to a 50 percent increase in business within the scope of three years, he pointed out.

In addition to business volume, PEO is also expanding in personnel. The organization has been restructured to include its new Acquisition Center, as well as Contracting Operations and Small Business offices. More than 50 employees were to be hired this year, mostly contractual and legal personnel. That number may increase along with the scope of PEO STRI operations as the number of its training-related Department of Defense (DoD) customers, such as the Air Force, increases over the next few years. **MSI**